Australian Journal of Business and Management Research
New South Wales Research Centre Australia (NSWRCA)

Volume. 9, Issue. 1, (28-42) ISSN (Online): 1839 – 0846

# Do Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in School Feeding Program Strategies Improve Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools in Makueni Country, Kenya

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Received: 10 October, 2024
Final Revision: 21 December, 2024
Accepted: 5 January, 2025
Published: 10 January, 2025
10.52283/NSWRCA.AJBMR.20240901A03

## Abstract

This study ought to bridge the gap by answering the research question; what is the relationship between Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya? Monitoring and Evaluation practices such as tracking learners' school attendance, conducting nutritional assessments, and collecting feedback help measure program success and guide improvements. A descriptive survey and a correlation research design were adopted. The study population comprised county education officers, sub-county education officers, management board chairpersons, head teachers, and School Feeding Program learners. Using Yamanes' formula, a sample size of 275 was drawn from the population where stratified, purposive sampling and simple random methods were employed to select the appropriate sample size. Data was presented in frequency tables with correlations, regressions, mean, standard deviations, and percentages. The study established no significant correlation between monitoring and evaluation practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County public primary schools. The study recommends that relevant stakeholders dedicate adequate resources to sustain learner participation in public primary schools and that the national and county governments should support monitoring and Evaluation Practices in schools.

**Keywords**: Monitoring and Evaluation practices, learner participation, public primary schools, learning, school feeding program

## I. Introduction

Public primary schools offer equitable and affordable education, foster social equity, and support community and economic development. They are instrumental in implementing free primary education policies and achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as quality education, as projected in Kenya's Vision 2030. Monitoring and evaluation (M & E) Practices link by ensuring the School Feeding Program (SFP) is aligned with learner needs, identifying gaps, and enabling adaptive improvements. Monitoring and evaluation Practices in SFP and learner participation are critical factors for student success. According to Filgona and Sakiyo, (2020), Gwany and Okoronka, (2020) discovered that active engagement in the classroom is key to increased motivation, encouraging learning, strengthening communication, and facilitating higher-order thinking skills. Addressing learner participation makes policy-making effective, enhances school life, and improves a range of outcomes for learners. However, they can only be achieved with proper planning, consistency and appropriate data collection,

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capacity building of M&E staff to enable analyze and dissemination of the collected information, and utilization of results to make it a reality. In most developing countries, children from low-income families who are old enough to attend school often drop out of school due to inadequate application of M & E practices in SFP. They are under the influence of hunger, which, according to Thuo, and Ndungu, (2024) affects their ability to focus in class, participate, and have high self-esteem. This is because school-going children need nutritious meals for the metabolic supply of body and brain development, which diverts learners' attention and slows their participation in school (Mogre, Sefogah Adetunji et al., 2021).

Policies such as School Feeding Program (SFP) have been implemented in Kenyan schools to enhance learner participation (World Food Program, 2023). The application of M & E practices in SFP is a key mediation for inspiring learning in regions of food insecurity, as the program focuses on improving school enrolment, attendance and retention, transition rate and academic performance (Tioko et al., 2021). In conjunction with the World Food Program (WFP), the Government of Kenya resolved a transition strategy from WFP to the Government-led Home-Grown School Meals Program (World Food Program, 2023). The implementation of an appropriate provision of school meals has seen some schools grow in enrollment. In contrast, others have declined in performance, thus pushing for school feeding program strategies to be adopted (Erukudi & Edabu, 2020). However, limited resources have forced institutions to efficiently allocate their resources among competing needs due to persistent socioeconomic disparities, poverty, and the high cost of healthy food, which, according to FAO et al. (2022), affects over eight hundred million individuals worldwide.

It has therefore become apparent that for the continuity and success of any school program, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is critical in evaluating whether expected results are being achieved, identifying barriers to implementation, and highlighting any unforeseen consequences (positive or negative) from an investment plan, program, or project (Tioko et al., 2021). This also helps comprehend how a project is progressing, assess if it is on course to meet its objectives, and ensure it has a beneficial effect. Organizations can use this approach to effectively allocate resources, make well-informed decisions, and take remedial action as necessary. Monitoring and evaluation need to aid in making sure that programs are reaching the intended target audience and that resources are being used efficiently.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methods have become increasingly widespread in different sectors in response to limited finances and the need to show results. The Kenyan constitution provides a solid basis for the country's M&E activities by strongly promoting responsive, accountable, and productive institutions (GoK, 2010). The operationalization of M & E in SFP and learner participation differs significantly among studies. This inconsistency leads to contradictory interpretations and varying outcomes. Given clarity on the transformation agenda presented by Vision 2030 in Kenya, there is a unique opportunity to prioritize planning of M&E activities, information gathering, capacity building, and utilization of M&E outcomes in institutions, which, according to Thuo and Ndungu, (2024) guarantees projects' performance. Maijo, (2021) observes that projects fail due to ineffective M&E practices. M&E practices of school meal program strategies involve adhering to the plan, budget allocation, and data collection, as well as equipping M&E staff with appropriate knowledge to tackle M&E undertakings and results utilization by implementing changes to achieve the program's goals.

**Aims and Originality of the Study**

This study contributes to the depository of knowledge, both existing, current, and future on managing programs, particularly in school feeding in Kenya. Ineffective Monitoring and evaluation practices, including poor planning and delayed feedback, undermine the sustainability and impact of school feeding program. The transformation agenda presented by Kenya's Vision 2030, has a unique opportunity to prioritize M&E to guarantee projects' performance (Cola, A.M, et al, 2024). Projects fail due to lack of effective M&E Practices (Drewnowski, 2022). Knowledge disseminated to learners on the importance of planning, feedback and utilization of M&E results will help them to gauge their level of performance, hence adding more value in understanding and generation of more productive ideas on how to tackle issues.

The study is fundamental to policy formulation makers in the implementation of policies, more specifically in the discipline of M&E. Non-involvement of project stakeholders in planning for M&E activities results to poor perception, and undermine their contribution in the development of the program. Collective responsibility, sharing of ideas and planning for future expansion result to the program ownership. The involvement of M&E practices in the school feeding program builds high resistance to good health of learners, improve school attendance, and retention resulting to excellent academic performance. Additionally, the employment of M&E practices in SFP will generate information on how best the program can be managed to improve the production of agricultural foodstuffs by incorporating smallholder farmers to increase local food production, thus reducing poverty and growing the country's economy. The report addressed ineffective employment of M&E Practices in SFP leading

to inadequate food provision to learners, poor academic performance, non-attendance and poor retention of learners to school.

The study used Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) to formulate a clear stance of involving M&E practices in the SFP. The theory posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation and modelling shaped by environmental interactions and reinforcement. It emphasizes on how positive reinforcement of M&E on food provision motivate and sustain active participation among learners. The theory supports by highlighting the importance of structured M&E practices, regular food provision, and effective feedback in modelling behaviours that enhance learner participation.

**Gap in the Literature Review**

The Government of Kenya, a signatory of the UN Charter for Education for All, has set an ambitious policy for a 100 percent transition rate from primary to secondary school (KIPPRA, 2020). Twenty-three counties in Kenya, including Makueni County, are classified as semi-arid and arid regions (ASALS) due to persistent droughts from failed consecutive rainfall seasons, which pose a huge threat to food security. According to the government of Makueni County (2023), the county must grapple with low school transition rates and poor student participation. In this socio-economic context, the school feeding projects, funded by the government and other development partners, have become crucial for keeping school-going children in school. Studies by Waiganjo, (2024) show that school feeding program are critical in enhancing learners' enrolment, attendance, and optimum learner participation in school, highlighting that some students lack food at home and rely on school meals. However, due to the various community interests in such projects and the huge funding involved, it has provided challenges in its management and sustainability to achieve the intended impact on the community (Maijo, 2021). Furthermore, heads of schools' face challenges of balancing competing requirements of school improvement of teachers' development and providing quality teaching and learning processes. As a result, all stakeholders' divergent needs and expectations must be adequately met. Others also argue that by increasing enrolment at all levels of education, this school feeding initiative has caused overcrowding in schools, resulting in poor participation of learners in school (Wachohi, 2019; Wekullo, 2022). Various studies have been carried out on managing school feeding programs. However, few studies have been done on monitoring and evaluating learner participation in schools. This study, therefore, assesses the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to investigate M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The following statements were established to investigate how M&E practices influence learner participation in public primary schools.

i) Stakeholders are involved in planning for Monitoring and Evaluation.
ii) The M&E activities schedule is adhered to during the program execution.
iii) Budget allocation for M&E activities is appropriately done.
iv) The methods used for disseminating M&E reports are reliable.
v) M&E generates quality data to support the program strategies.
vi) M&E results are communicated to relevant stakeholders on time.
vii) The staff involved in supervising M&E activities are knowledgeable.
viii) M&E officers are trained in data management.
ix) M&E staff are enabled to benchmark with other counties.
x) M&E results are used in making program decisions.
xi) M&E results are used to improve the program.
xii) M&E results are used in enhancing M&E practices. Composite Mean, Standard Deviation.

## II. Literature Review

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices are important aspects of project execution and management. The concept of M&E practices encompasses planning, data dissemination, capacity building, and utilization of M&E results. According to Kabeyi, (2019) monitoring and evaluation practices aid in assessing the accomplishments and effectiveness of the implemented program. These findings were supported by Ba, (2021) who found out that M&E practices systematically safeguard program events, thus considering the agreement on the standards M&E can achieve. They further established that planning for M&E activities regarding who was involved in the exercise, data dissemination, capacity building of M&E staff to enable them to handle the exercise comprehensively and

successfully, and M&E results utilization were some of the key indicators of M&E practices. M&E practices enable the project team to understand the program's success. According to Glasgow et al. (2019) good M&E practices aim to figure out how well a program can achieve its goals. Bonareri, (2020) supported this, arguing that M&E practices aid in shaping the direction towards national responsibility as a resource of mobilization and a guide to budget allocation. Lack of project monitoring and evaluation results causes delays in project schedules and may lead to the utilization of more resources for project completion.

Capacity building for M&E staff is important for effective involvement in projects. Identifying program restrictions and biases is key when planning data analysis and dissemination. The components for each element are defined, and a cost estimate for staffing for all internal employees, external consultant expenses, and general human resource expenses is determined. The availability of capital expenditure on improving facilities such as office equipment and general maintenance of software and hardware, which are essential components in project development, directly or indirectly enhances staff performance (Kerzner, 2022).

M&E practices play a crucial role in managing resource utilization. Okuta, (2019) states that these practices track the inputs, outputs, outcomes, and influences of program progress. For instance, the School Feeding Program (SFP) uses locally produced food products to provide employment opportunities and alleviate poverty. Monitoring the quality of locally grown food ensures that learners can eat safe and nutritious food from local farmers near school environments. According to Nyirenda et al. (2018) M&E is a continuous process that is done periodically in schools to improve teaching methodologies and learning processes. Therefore, the current study investigated how monitoring and evaluation practices moderate the correlation between school feeding program strategies and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya.

## III. Methodology

This study used a pragmatic paradigm since it allows for the use of mixed methods of research rather than relying on one approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2022**).** The research employed descriptive survey and correlational designs due to their ability to use descriptive and inferential methods. Descriptive research was employed to identify the population under investigation as it provides a holistic and in-depth approach to addressing the research problem (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019**).** Descriptive survey and correlational approach were applied to determine the degree to which the values for the predictors are linked to the dependent variable to determine the association between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Descriptive survey design is suitable for gathering information by capturing current practices, challenges, and perceptions, enabling a comprehensive design understanding of the variables. Whereas correlational design consents for examination of linkages between variables, enabling the possibility to identify the strength and direction of associations among the study variables. It allows for score estimation and explains the correlation between the predictor and dependent variables. The study applied a mixed-methods approach to analyse the influence of school feeding program strategies and their contribution to learner participation in public primary schools in the territory of the study, Makueni County, Kenya.

Therefore, the population of 875 people consisted of; 2 County Education Officers, 3 Sub- County Education Officers, 30 County Quality Assurance Officers, 210 Head Teachers, 210 nominated Teachers and 210 Learner representatives in each school, and 210 Chairpersons (BOM) formed the target population that was used to give directions on the progress of school feeding program strategies. Chairpersons are well equipped with knowledge of school meals and how these influence learner participation in public primary schools. While schools with feeding program are represented by Head Teachers as they are the technocrats empowered to handle and supervise the school meals program. Categories of people participating in the research are presented on Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1:** Target Population

| Strata | Target population |
|---|---|
| County Education officers | 2 |
| Sub-County Education officers | 3 |
| County Quality Assurance officers | 30 |
| Head Teachers | 210 |
| Teachers (Nominated) | 210 |
| Learner rep | 210 |
| Chairpersons- Board of Management | 210 |
| **Total** | **875** |

**Source:** Makueni County Education office, (2018)

**Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

This section describes the study's sample size and sampling technique. These are explained in the subsequent sub-thematic areas:

**Sample Size**

Yamene's formula (1967) was employed to calculate the sample size. The sample size (n) was randomly selected to represent subjects from each stratum with an acceptable margin of error at 0.05.

Yamane's formula (1967) displayed as;

$$\text{Sample size (n)} = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$$

Where;
N= target population
e = precision error at 95% Margin of error = 0.05
n = Determined Sample Size
$e^2 = (0.05^2)$
Hence, N = 875 at 95 percent level of confidence. The representative Sample Size was calculated as indicated here under;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)} = \frac{875}{1+875(0.05^2)} = \frac{875}{1+875(0.0025)} = 275$$

Hence, the study's sample size was 275 people.

**Sampling Procedure**

The proportional allocation of respondents in each stratum was used to ensure that each category was represented according to its size in the population. To enhance the generalizability of the study findings, the same proportion of the population was applied in selecting the sample size. The selection was made using simple random sampling because it represents a subset of a statistical population in every category, giving it an equivalent chance of being selected. Table 3.2 describes the sampling procedure in each stratum.

**Table 3.2:** Sampling Procedure

| Categories | Target Population | Sample Size | Sampling Procedure |
|---|---|---|---|
| CEOs | 2 | 1 | Purposive sampling |
| SCEOs | 3 | 1 | Purposive sampling |
| CQAOs | 30 | 9 | Purposive sampling |
| H/Teachers | 210 | 66 | Simple random sampling |
| Teachers | 210 | 66 | Simple random sampling |
| Learners | 210 | 66 | Simple random sampling |
| BoM (Chairpersons) | 210 | 66 | Simple random sampling |
| Total | 875 | 275 | |

**Source:** Makueni County Education Office, (2021)

After the determination of sample size, proportional allocation was used to distribute respondents among the following categories:
$n_1 = n.p_1$
$n_2 = n.p_2$
Where:
$n_1$ = Category of Sample Size
n = Determined Sample size
p = Proportion of Population per Category
Therefore, County Education Officers are represented by;

$$n_1 = 275 \times \frac{2}{875} = 1 \text{ respondent}$$

Sub- County Education Officers

$n_2 = 275 \times \frac{3}{875} =$ 1 respondent

County Quality Assurance Officers

$n_3 = 275 \times \frac{30}{875} =$ 9 respondents

Head Teachers of Public Primary Schools

$n_4 = 275 \times \frac{210}{875} =$ 66 respondents

Teachers in school feeding program

$n_5 = 275 \times \frac{210}{875} =$ 66 respondents

Learners in school feeding program

$n_6 = 275 \times \frac{210}{875} =$ 66 respondents

Chairpersons- Board of Management

$n_7 = 275 \times \frac{210}{875} =$ 66 respondents

**Research Instruments**

Two research tools were used to gather information; a Questionnaire and an Interview guide. An open-ended and closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from head teachers, chairpersons-Board of management, teachers, and learner representatives in the school feeding program. Interview guide was used for gathering qualitative information from the County Education Officer, Sub- County Education Officer, and County Quality Assurance Officers. A detailed account of the research tools used in the study is detailed hereunder.

The questionnaire contained closed and open-ended questions. Patel & Patel, (2019) opined that a research tool comprises of systematized queries, deliberated and apprehending answers from respondents. The tool was preferred for the particular cadre of respondents because of the high number of respondents involved and hence was ideal for collecting quantitative data. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher and research assistants. There were two types of questionnaires; one for headteachers, teachers and board of management chairpersons. While the other questionnaire was meant for learner representatives in school meals program. In the circumstance that the headteachers and teachers were busy, the questionnaire was left behind for them to fill during their own free time. Chairpersons-Board of Management were requested to fill their questionnaire on the spot because they are not permanently employed by the school and was not easy to trace them later. While the questionnaire designed for the learner representatives in school feeding program was administered on the spot so as to guide them through. Questions not understood by the respondents were explained in detail to ensure that they understood the meaning of the questions before submitting their answers. Respondents were briefed on the reason for conducting the study before commencement to enlighten them on what was expected. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents to scrutinize issues on board as opposed to the interview guide.

Interview guide research tool was applied for collecting data from County Education Officers, Sub County Education Officers and County Quality Assurance Officers. An interview is more specific, and is aimed at collecting more information as compared to the questionnaire. Interview guide is more suitable to this particular cadre because they are involved in the initial stages of planning and the facilitation processes. Further, it is conducted by trained personnel using similar study procedure as a questionnaire, Patel & Patel, (2019). Interviews are verbal questions and allow for flexibility as the researcher restructured the questions to suit the respondents (Dubey & Kothari, 2022). An interview is an activity designed to amalgamate similar ideas and thoughts of interviewees, opinions or attitudes on a matter of interest to a researcher. The researcher conducted the interviews specifically because these were high-ranking personnel and required a convincing person to gather the tangible information required for the study.

Interviews are valid and effective in evaluating respondent's views, feelings, and perspectives (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). An interview is more in-depth, more cautious than a questionnaire as it is personalized and focused to the area of study. One-to-one semi-structured interview was considered as most appropriate since the key objective was to collect contextual data ((Shanon, 2022). Foremost, the researcher clarified to the interviewees the aim for conducting this research.

## IV. Data Analysis

Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in this study refer to the trends that were established as effective in improving the relationship between SFP and learner participation. It was necessary to solicit respondents' views on the level of agreement or disagreement on the twelve accounts on M & E Practices based on a likert scale of 1-5 points

where; strongly disagreed (SD) =1, Disagreed (D) = 2, Neutral (N)=3, Agree (A)=4 and Strongly Agreed (SA)=5. The outcomes were analyzed and demonstrated using Means and Standard Deviations. Additionally, frequencies and percentages were employed to each response in every statement. Table 1 displays the item mean and standard deviation.

**Table 1:** Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools

| Statement | SD | D | N | A | SA | Mean | Std Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Stakeholders are involved in planning for M&E | 00.00%) | 30(51.7%) | 3(5.2%) | 24(41.4%) | 1(1.7%) | 3.07 | 1.01 |
| 2. M&E activities schedule is adhered to during the program execution | 0(0.00%) | 52(89.7%) | 1(1.7%) | 5(8.6%) | 0(0.00%) | 3.81 | 0.576 |
| 3. Budget allocation for M&E activities is appropriately done | 0(0.00%) | 11(19%) | 27(46.5%) | 20(34.5%) | 0(0.00%) | 2.84 | 0.721 |
| 4. Methods used for disseminating M&E reports are reliable | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 4(6.8%) | 54(93.2%) | 1.07 | 0.256 |
| 5. M&E generates quality data to support the program strategies | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 2(3.4%) | 28(46.6%) | 29(50%) | 1.52 | 0.538 |
| 6. M&E results are communicated to relevant stakeholders on time | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 5(8.6%) | 53(91.4%) | 1.09 | 0.283 |
| 7. M & E staff involved in supervising activities are knowledgeable | 7(12%) | 48(82.8%) | 3(5.2%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 4.07 | 0.413 |
| 8. M&E staff are trained in data management | 0(0.00%) | 42(72.4%) | 16(27.6%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 3.72 | 0.451 |
| 9. M&E staff are enabled to benchmark with other counties | 0(0.00%) | 4(6.9%) | 49(84.5%) | 5(8.6%) | 0(0.00%) | 2.98 | 0.397 |
| 10. M&E results are used in making program decisions | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 1(1.7%) | 2(3.4%) | 55(94.9%) | 1.07 | 0.317 |
| 11. M&E results are used to improve the program | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 2(3.4%) | 56(96.6%) | 1.03 | 0.184 |
| 12. M&E results are used in enhancing M&E practices | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 0(0.00%) | 4(6.8%) | 54(93.2%) | 1.07 | 0.256 |
| Composite Mean, Standard Deviation | | | | | | 2.02 | 0.346 |

**Source:** Author's compiled by authors

The results in Table 5 indicate that the composite mean and composite standard deviation for the M&E practices were 2.02 and 0.346, respectively, suggesting that, applying the Likert scale, most respondents disagreed (mean = 2.02) that M&E practices influence learner participation. Similarly, twelve statements were established to investigate how M&E practices influence learner participation in public primary schools.

Statement 1; 'Stakeholders are involved in planning for M&E activities'. The mean recorded was 3.07, while the standard deviation was 1.01. The result shows that the majority of 30 (51.7%) agreed that Headteachers, Teachers and Chairpersons BOM are involved in planning for M&E. The results show that the mean tally achieved on the line item was 3.07, higher than the composite mean of 2.02. The standard deviation on the line item was 1.01, higher than the composite standard deviation of 0.346, demonstrating a disagreement among the respondents.

Statement 2; 'M&E *activities are accomplished per schedule during the program execution."* The recorded mean tally was 3.81 and the standard deviation was 0.576. The results show that the mean tally obtained on the line statement was 3.81. This was greater than the 2.02 composite mean. Among the 58 respondents, 52 (89.7%) agreed that M&E activities are accomplished per schedule. The standard deviation achieved on the line item was 0.576. This was higher than the 0.346 composite standard deviation, demonstrating a disagreement amongst the respondents.

Statement 3; *'Budget* allocation for M&E activities is done by M&E staff.*'* The recorded mean was 2.84, and the standard deviation was 0.721. The outcomes reveal that the majority of the respondents, 27 (46.5%), were neutral on whether the budget allocation for M&E activities is done by M&E staff. The standard deviation obtained on the line item was 0.721. This was greater than the 0.346 achieved composite standard deviation, demonstrating a disagreement in views amongst the respondents.

Statement 4; 'The methods *for disseminating M&E reports are reliable."* The mean recorded was 1.07, while the standard deviation achieved was 0.256. The majority, 54 (93.1%), strongly disagreed regarding the reliability of the methods used for disseminating M&E reports; hence, they were not certain that it would influence learning participation in public primary schools. The results show that the line-item mean tally was 1.07. This was less compared to the 2.02 composite mean. The standard deviation for the line item was 0.256. This was lower than the 0.346 composite standard deviation, demonstrating a disagreement amongst the respondents.

Statement 5; 'M&E generates quality data to support the program strategy." The recorded mean was 1.52, while the standard deviation was 0.538. The results indicate that the majority, 29 (50%), strongly disagreed that M&E generates quality data to support the program strategy, thereby negatively influencing learning participation in public primary schools. The results show that the mean tally for the line item was 1.52. This was less compared to the 2.02 composite mean. This implied that the respondents disagreed that M&E generates quality data to support the program strategy. The standard deviation line item was 0.538 higher compared to the 0.346 compound standard deviation, indicating a disagreement in views among participants.

Statement 6; *'M&E* results are communicated to relevant stakeholders on time'. The obtained mean was 1.09, while the standard deviation achieved was 0.283. The result indicates that among the 58 respondents, 53 (91.4%) strongly disagreed that M&E results are communicated to relevant stakeholders on time, negatively influencing learning participation in public primary schools. The results show the mean tally for line item was 1.09. This was lower compared to the 2.02 compound mean. An implication is that the respondents strongly disagreed that M&E results should be communicated to relevant stakeholders on time. The standard deviation obtained on the line item was 0.283.

Statement 7; 'The staff supervising M&E activities are knowledgeable.' The recorded mean was 4.07, and the standard deviation obtained was 0.413. These findings indicate that 48 (82.8%) of the 5-majority agreed that the staff supervising M&E activities are knowledgeable. The results show that the line-item mean tally of 4.07 was greater than the 2.02 compound mean.

Statement 8; 'M*&E* officers are trained in data management. The recorded mean was 3.72, while the standard deviation achieved was 0.451. These results indicate that the majority, 42 (72.4%), agreed that M&E officers are trained in data management. The results show that the mean tally for the line statement was 3.72, which was greater than the 2.02 compound mean.

Statement 9: 'M&E staff are enabled to benchmark with other counties." The recorded mean was 2.98, while the standard deviation obtained was 0.397. Most of the outcomes, 49 (84.5%) were neutral so that M&E staff could benchmark with other counties. These findings showed that the mean tally for the line item was 2.98. This was greater compared to the 2.02 compound mean. The line statement standard deviation was 0.397, which was higher than the 0.346 compound standard deviation, an indication of disagreements in views amongst the respondents.
The statement *10;* M&E results are used in making program decision decisions obtained a mean of.07, while the standard deviation was 0.317. These results denoted that the majority, 55 (94.9%), strongly disagreed that M&E results are used in making program decisions. The results show that the mean tally for the line statement was 1.07.

Statement 11 states; 'that *M&E results are utilized to improve the program.* The mean recorded was 1.03, while the standard deviation was 0.184. These reveal that the majority of 56 (96.6%) strongly disagreed that M&E results are utilized to improve the program, thereby negatively influencing learning participation in public primary schools.

Statement 12; '*M*&E results are utilized in enhancing M&E practices.' The recorded mean was 1.07, while the standard deviation achieved was 0.256. The outcome denotes that out of the 58 respondents, the majority, 54 (93.2%), strongly disagreed that M&E results are utilized in enhancing M&E practices.

**Correlation Analysis of Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools**

To investigate the association between M&E practices and learner participation in school, the Pearson correlation coefficient was applied at a 95% confidence level. Table 2 demonstrates the correlation results achieved.

**Table 2:** Correlation Analysis for Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools

| M&E practices statements | | Learner participation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Stakeholders are involved in planning for M&E activities | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.171*<br>0.200<br>58 |
| 2.M&E activities are accomplished as per schedule | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.076*<br>0.571<br>58 |
| 3.Budget allocation for M&E activities accomplished by M&E staff | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.240*<br>0.069<br>58 |
| 4. The methods used for disseminating M&E reports were reliable | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.020*<br>0.882<br>58 |
| 5.M&E generates quality data to support the program strategies | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.173<br>0.193<br>58 |
| 6.M&E results are communicated to relevant stakeholders on time | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.066*<br>0.623<br>58 |
| 7. The M & E staff involved in supervising M&E activities are knowledgeable | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.049<br>0.715<br>58 |
| 8. M&E officers are trained in data management | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | 0.079<br>0556<br>58 |
| 9. M&E staff are enabled to benchmark with other counties | Pearson correlation<br>sig. (2-tailed)<br>n | -0.204<br>0.124<br>58 |
| 10.M&E results are used in making program decisions | Pearson correlation<br>Sig.(2-taled)<br>n | -0.219<br>0.098<br>58 |
| 11.M&E results are used to improve the program | Pearson correlation<br>Sig.(2-tailed)<br>n | -0.109<br>0.417<br>58 |
| 12. M&E results are used in enhancing M&E practices | Pearson correlation<br>Sig. (2-tailed<br>n | 0.168<br>0.209<br>58 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| M&E practices (overall correlation) | Pearson correlation | -0.261* |
| | Sig.(2-tailed) | 0.048 |
| | N | 58 |

*Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)
Note: compiled by authors

To determine the extent of the correlation between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools, various traits of M&E practices and learner participation in school were investigated according to the ensuing null hypothesis: $H_0$: There is no significant relationship between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The equivalent scientific model for the hypothesis was acknowledged: learner participation in public primary schools = f (M&E practices). The inquiry established a weak negative general association (r = -0.261), resulting in statistical significance, where P-value = 0.048 < 0.05), indicating a significant correlation between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya, preceding rejection of the null hypothesis ($H_0$: There is no significant relationship between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya), and acknowledgement of the alternative hypothesis, and hence the study outcomes determined there is insignificant correlation between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The results in Table 6 further indicated that all of the twelve statements of M&E practices were insignificant.

**Regression Analysis of Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools**

A simple linear regression was employed to investigate how M&E practices influence learner participation in school. It was necessary to solicit respondents' opinions on the impact of M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools. The rationale of employing a simple regression model is to ascertain how M&E practices predict significantly or insignificantly influenced learner participation in public primary schools. This is explained in the succeeding Sub-themes.

**Model Summary for M&E Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools**

The model summary aimed to determine how the M&E Practices forecaster significantly or insignificantly influenced learner participation. Table 3 represents the model summary for regression.

**Table 3:** Regression Model Summary for M&E Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.261[a] | 0.068 | 0.052 | 0.451 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), M&E practices
b. Source: compiled by authors

The model summary illustrated in Table 3 suggests a weak affirmative association (R= 0.261) between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools and those foreseen by the regression model. Moreover, M&E practices explain a variation of 6.8 % in learner participation in public primary schools.

**ANOVA for M&E Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools**

The study investigated how the regression model was the best fit for forecasting learner participation in public primary schools after using M&E practices. Table 4 represents the results.

**Table 4**: ANOVA Representing a Regression of M&E Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 0.834 | 1 | 0.834 | 4.101 | 0.048[b] |
| | Residual | 11.387 | 56 | 0.203 | | |
| | Total | 12.221 | 57 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Learner participation in Public Primary Schools
b. Predictors: (Constant), M&E practices
c. Note: compiled by authors

ANOVA results shown in Table 4 indicated (F-statistics (1.56) =4.101 was significant since the P –value = 0.048< 0.05, denoting the predictor co-efficient was at least ≠ 0. Thus, the regression model outcomes do not significantly show better prediction of learner participation in public primary schools.

**Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Learner Participation in Public Primary Schools For Headteachers, Teachers and Chairpersons BOM**

Monitoring and Evaluation Practices refer to trends established as effective in improving program efficiency. Respondents were asked for their views based on agreements or disagreements on the twelve accounts of Monitoring and Evaluation Practices on a Likert scale of 1-5 points where Strongly disagreed (SD)=1, disagreed(D)=2, neutral(N)=3, Agreed(A)=4, and strongly agreed (SA)=5. The outcomes were evaluated and represented using Means and Standard deviation. Moreover, frequencies and percentages were employed for every answer given on every statement. The statement Mean and Standard deviation were analyzed and represented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Learner Participation

| Statement | SD | D | N | A | SA | Mean | Std Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Headteachers, Teachers, and BOM chairpersons are involved in planning for M&E | 64(33.1%) | 61(31.6%) | 0(0.00%) | 60(31.1%) | 8(4.2%) | 3.59 | 1.34 |
| 2. The M&E activities schedule is adhered to during the program execution | 17(8.8%) | 101(52.3%) | 12(6.2%) | 59(30.6%) | 4(2.1%) | 3.35 | 1.07 |
| 3. Budget allocation for M&E activities is appropriately done | 4(2.1%) | 27(14%) | 18(9.3%) | 84(43.5%) | 60(31.1%) | 2.12 | 1.068 |
| 4. Technical assistance is sought to perfect M&E practices | 1(0.5%) | 14(7.3%) | 35(18.1%) | 111(57.5 %) | 32(16.6%) | 2.18 | 0.810 |
| 5.M&E reports are presented on time | 51(26.4%) | 25(13%) | 1(0.5%) | 15(7.8%) | 101(52.3%) | 2.53 | 1.78 |
| 6.M&E generates quality data to support the program | 18(9.3%) | 71(36.9%) | 13(6.7%) | 28(14,5%) | 63(32.6%) | 2.76 | 1.46 |
| 7. M&E results are communicated to relevant stakeholders | 41(21.2%) | 40(20.7%) | 0(0.0%) | 18(9.3%) | 94(48.8%) | 2.56 | 1.71 |

| Statement | SD | D | N | A | SA | Mean | Std Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. Generated M&E information is well understood | 16(8.3%) | 64(33.2%) | 11(5.7%) | 32(16.6%) | 70(36.2%) | 2.61 | 1.46 |
| 9. The staff involved in supervising M&E are skilled | 10(5.2%) | 139(72%) | 21(10.9%) | 13(6.7%) | 10(5.2%) | 3.65 | 0.883 |
| 10. M&E staff are trained in data management | 3(1.6%) | 105(54.4%) | 59(30.6%) | 18(9.3%) | 8(4.1%) | 3.40 | 0.842 |
| 11. There are seminars organized to equip M&E staff with adequate knowledge | 4(2.1%) | 49(25.3%) | 70(36.3%) | 42(21.8%) | 28(14.5%) | 2.79 | 1.05 |
| 12. M&E staff are enabled to benchmark with other Counties | 6(3.1%) | 59(30.6%) | 69(35.7%) | 33(17.1%) | 26(13.5%) | 2.93 | 1.07 |
| 13.M&E results are used in making program decisions | 89(46.1%) | 9(4.7%) | 2(1.0%) | 22(11.4%) | 71(36.8%) | 3.12 | 1.87 |
| 14.M&E results are used for benchmarking with other organizations | 70(36.3%) | 23(11.8%) | 20(10.4%) | 47(24.4%) | 33(17.1%) | 2.74 | 1.56 |
| 15. M&E results are used to improve the program | 80(41.5%) | 20(10.4%) | 2(1.0%) | 17(8.8%) | 74(38.3%) | 3.08 | 1.84 |
| 16.M&E results are used in enhancing M&E practices | 76(39.5%) | 23(11.9%) | 7(3.6%) | 24(12.4%) | 63(32.6%) | 3.13 | 1.77 |
| Composite Mean, Standard Deviation | | | | | | 2.91 | 1.35 |

**Source:** Compiled by authors

The results in Table 5 indicate that the composite mean and standard deviation on M&E practices are recorded as 2.91 and 135, respectively. Using the Likert scale, most respondents were neutral (mean=2.91) in believing M&E practices influence learner participation. Similarly, sixteen items were established to determine how M&E practices influence Learner participation in public primary schools.

## V. Discussion

The study investigated the impact of various components for M & E Practices in school feeding program and learner participation from both learners' views and school stakeholder's perspectives. The first statement; '*Stakeholders are involved in planning for M&E activities.' Most* respondents agreed that the involvement of Headteachers, Teachers, and Chairpersons BOM in planning for M&E positively enhances learner participation in public primary schools. These findings agree with Gaibo and Mbugua's, (2019) argument that M&E is a continuous process that helps project implementers make informed decisions on project procedures, provisions, and efficiency using objective evidence.

Statement (2) stated; that '*M&E activities are accomplished per schedule during the program execution*.' The study's findings reveal that accomplishing M&E activities per schedule positively enhances learner participation in public primary schools. These findings agree with those of Njeru and Kirui, (2022) who found that monitoring and evaluation were major driving factors in improvement projects.

Statement (3); that '*Budget allocation for M&E activities is done by M&E staff."* The findings reveal that it needs to be clarified whether the budget allocation for M&E activities is done by M&E staff. These findings are in line with Gaibo and Mbugua, (2019), Kanyamuna et al. (2019), and Kerzner, (2022) who found that M&E practices aid in shaping the direction towards national responsibility as a resource of mobilization and a guide to budget allocation.

Statement (4); 'The methods *for disseminating M&E reports are reliable.'* The findings show that the methods used for disseminating M&E reports are unreliable and, hence, unable to influence learning participation in public primary schools. These findings agree with Kuchenmüller et al. (2022), who argue that disseminating M&E outcomes to those not part of your program can be difficult because different audiences have different information requirements.

Statement (5); '*M&E generates quality data to support the program strategy'.* The findings revealed "that M&E doesn't generate quality, does not support the program strategy, and negatively influences public primary school learning participation. These results agree with Kerzner, (2022) who asserted that the monitoring and evaluation budget can be delineated within the overall project or program budget to give the monitoring and evaluation function the due recognition it plays in project management.

Statement (6); '*M&E results are communicated to relevant stakeholders on time'*.' The findings reveal 'that the lack of proper communication of M&E results to relevant stakeholders negatively influences learning participation. These findings were consistent with the study of Karimi, Mulwa and Kyalo, (2021) which found that distributing M&E results to people outside your program was complex because different audiences had diverse information needs.

Statement (7); "*The staff supervising M&E activities are knowledgeable."* The study shows that "staff involved in supervising M&E activities are skilled and positively influence learner participation in public primary schools (Karimi et al., 2021).

Statement (8) states; "*M&E officers are trained on data management."* 'The study findings reveal that the Monitoring and Evaluation staff were trained in data management, which positively influenced learner participation in public primary schools. The research findings agree with Okafor, (2022) and Wassem et al. (2019) posited that capacity building is a continuing process involving intellectual, social, and administrative capital to add value and gain maximum output.

Statement (9) states; that 'M*&E staff are enabled to benchmark with other countries.' However, the findings do not indicate* that M&E staff was unable to benchmark with other countries. These results agree with Hargreaves's, (2011) assertion that capacity building is an ongoing process encompassing intellectual, social, and organizational capital to add value and obtain maximum output.

Statement (10); that '*M&E results are used in making program decisions."* " The majority, therefore, agree that M&E results are used in making program decisions; the results agree with Niyivuga et al. (2019), who found out that M&E practices guided staff and their supervisors toward targeted results and necessary improvement strategies.

Statement (11); '*M&E results are utilized' in improving the program'):* These findings reveal that M&E results are not seen as being utilized to improve the program to improve learner participation in public primary schools. These results concur with Niyivuga et al. (2019), who established M&E practices to guide staff and supervisors toward targeted results and basic development strategies.

Statement (12); that 'M&E results are utilized' in enhancing M&E practice "es." The study, therefore, reveals that M&E results are not utilized in enhancing M&E practices, thereby negatively influencing learning participation in public primary schools. These findings agree with Niyivuga et al. (2019), who argued that M&E practices guide staff and supervisors toward targeted results and necessary development strategies.

## VI. Conclusion

The study examined M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. Pearson's correlation, resulting from the learners' perspective, indicates an insignificant influence on M&E practices and learner participation. The p-value above the set tolerance of significance significantly influenced M&E practices and learner participation. However, from the perspective of school stakeholders, the Pearson correlation and the simple linear regression coefficient results indicated a significant influence of M&E practices on learner participation. The p-values less than the set significance threshold implied a significant influence of smallholder farmers' engagement on learner participation. Similarly, a simple regression model to ascertain how M&E practices predict significantly or insignificantly influenced learner participation in public primary schools suggests a weak affirmative association between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary

schools. The study concludes that there is no significant correlation between M&E practices and learner participation in public primary schools in Makueni County public primary schools.

**Recommendations**

- For learner participation in public primary schools to succeed, furthermore, policies, particularly those governing the implementation of school feeding program strategies, must be considered by the national and county governments. These policies should mainstream the strategies to all public primary schools, head teachers, teachers, and chairpersons of the Board of Management, thereby enhancing learner participation.
- The Ministry of Education at the national level, the county government, headteachers, and all other key players in public primary schools with feeding programs should review their M&E practices, specifically in result utilization.
- To achieve the set goals, both the national and county governments, particularly the departments charged with school feeding programs, should commit more time and resources to M&E practices.

**Limitations and Call for Future Research**

- Makueni County's vastness made locating schools with feeding program challenging; researcher used motorbikes for affordable and quick transport.
- The study focused on three sub-counties (Kibwezi, Makindu, and Kathozweni), excluding other sub-counties with school feeding program.
- Scheduling visits to schools was challenging, with some participants unavailable, necessitating leaving questionnaire or conducting online interviews.
- Some respondents were reluctant to complete the questionnaire due to inexperience; they were reassured about confidentiality and the academic purpose of the study.

**Areas for Further Research**

- Conduct similar studies in other counties beyond Makueni to compare and assess school feeding program strategies across regions.
- Investigate under-researched areas such as M & E Practices in school feeding program in other counties
- Expand the study population to include private primary schools, targeting headteachers, teachers, parents, learners, and school directors to enhance research knowledge and enable result triangulation.

**Competing interest statement**

The study was not funded at all. The authors of this research had no conflicting interests whatsoever.

**Author (s) Contribution Statement**

Authors of this study contributed in the revision and approval of the manuscript. The researcher, Mary Mbithe Mwanthi did develop, revise and proof read the manuscript according to the recommended guidelines. Doctor Charles Misiko Wafula assisted in structuring, proof reading and approving the manuscript for submission, while Doctor John Mwaura Mbugua reviewed the manuscript and approved for submission.

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